



The Humbling and Other Poems

Robert J. Tiess

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Via formal verses, the poetry collection The Humbling and Other Poems conveys a gentle, generous world view.

Written in traditional formats, the entries of Robert J. Tiess's poetry collection *The Humbling and Other Poems* concern gratitude, maturity, and life lessons.

These poems reflect on wide life goals and concepts, like acquiring humility, with the aim of "representing a larger journey toward freedom, compassion, selflessness, understanding, wisdom, bliss, and peace." Often, they deal in familiar imagery, scenes, and philosophies, handling each in a considerate manner and honoring human struggles. "Epitaph," for example, delivers advice for a good life:

*some hope to keep
the mornings bright,
then good to tell
a wrong from right*

The poems, though "arranged in seven parts ... can be read in any order." Still, though they are thematically titled, those seven parts gather poems that are more abstract than suggested by their titles.

The collection is dominated by iambic tetrameters, as with "No humbled heart wants dominance," resulting in similarity between how individual poems sound. As it progresses, the book becomes increasingly predictable in form. In a limited number of poems, the rhyme schemes vary, resulting in otherwise rare sonic variety and avoiding the sing-song tone that dominates elsewhere. In "Conversations with Gaia," for example, the rhyme scheme varies between the slant rhymes in the first two stanzas and another pattern in the third stanza. In too many of the poems, however, a false appearance of variation is given by breaking up the iambic lines on the page.

Much of the book's figurative language is connected to nature; some of it is fresh, as with a calendar that's been extinct for years, but much of it is unsurprising, too. A few poetic conceits hold attention, as with a single metaphor that functions throughout "A Raindrop on Its Journey," which centers the perspective of the raindrop. Even there, though: the raindrop's voice echoes those of the narrators of the book's other poems.

A positive worldview unites these poems best. Together, they work through soothing observations and self-discoveries. And this perspective reinforces itself throughout. Further, the poetic entries are followed by essays in the book's back matter, which explain elements of poetry, like the distinctions between metaphors and similes, with clarity and concision. They are joined by a list for further reading and a glossary of literary terms. A friendly, generous tone informs all parts of the book.

The poetry collection *The Humbling and Other Poems* conveys a gentle, generous world view in formal verses, and with enthusiasm for its craft.

MICHELE SHARPE (June 28, 2022)

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